

# Essential Instruments for Drum Circles

<https://thevault.musicarts.com/essential-instruments-for-drum-circles-other-rhythm-based-activities/>

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Drum circle, you say? Viewed with great suspicion in the past, the contemporary facilitated drum circle and other rhythm-based experiences have found their way into organizations of all kinds, both public and private, and are used to create social connection, encourage creative expression, and as part of a comprehensive music program, are great tools for teaching improvisation, listening, dynamics and the elements of composition. They can also be used to build interest in your music programs. A weekly drum circle gives students the opportunity to recognize their capacity for music making while having a lot of fun. That's the moment when you get to invite them to join your music program.

The art of facilitation is also a powerful way to build your connection to the rest of the school and your value within that community. The work you do with students with special needs, drum circles at school events, and school staff meetings, will illustrate your value outside of the music classroom.

I follow the formula noted by facilitator, Arthur Hull of Village Music Circles. He suggests: 50% full body drums (djembes, etc.) and 50% handheld percussion (shakers, tambourines, etc.) for these reasons:

- More possibilities for musical expression

## Essential Instruments for Drum Circles & Other Rhythm-Based Activities

- Creates the possibility of using metaphors about diversity (small sounds are also important/ we are all different; just like these instruments, but we are all important, etc.)

- Less expensive and easier to store and to schlep!

<https://thevault.musicarts.com/essential-instruments-for-drum-circles-other-rhythm-based-activities/> should include at least one very low drum, a floor tom for instance. One low drum for every 25 people is a good rule of thumb. A circle of small rhythm-based large drums, Djembes, Doumbeks, Tubanos, will create a more “melodic” circle. Stay away from Congas as they are not ideal for drum circles. Djembes are very popular and may be used with a stand. Some drums made for educational and drum circle use have molded bases.

Equal numbers of shakers, tambourines, wood sounds (blocks, plastic or wood, frogs scrapers, etc.), and small bells (Agogo bells work well) will balance out the circle.

Other interesting instruments are rasps, guiros, rattles and small ethnic percussion of all kinds. Don’t use claves! They often are mistaken for mallets or stick and, well, there goes that drum head....!

Supplement your kit with handheld drums, such as frame drums or Sound Shapes. Lightweight and inexpensive, they offer opportunities for movement activities.

Use only lightweight mallets for the bass drum (only one to avoid note over-zealous note density!), short, small sticks for the bells and blocks (one very enthusiastic student with a bell and a large stick can take over a circle).

Lastly, the art of facilitation is quite different from the art of teaching; the role is to guide the group energy, rather than dictate direction. I’ve provided a few resources below.

**Remo Recreational:** <http://remo.com/experience/recreation/> (<http://remo.com/experience/recreation/>)

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**Remo Health and Wellness:** <http://remo.com/experience/health-and-wellness/> (<http://remo.com/experience/health-and-wellness/>)  
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**Village Music Circles:** [www.drumcircle.com](http://www.drumcircle.com) (<http://www.drumcircle.com/>)

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**Essential Instruments for Drum Circles & Other Rhythm-Based Activities by Christine Stevens:** [www.ubdrumcircles.com](http://www.ubdrumcircles.com) (<http://www.ubdrumcircles.com/>)  
**Innovative Drum Circles: Beyond Beat Into Harmony by Mary Knysh:** [www.rhythmicconnections.com/products.htm](http://www.rhythmicconnections.com/products.htm) (<http://www.rhythmicconnections.com/products.htm>)

## About the Author:

John Fitzgerald, Manager of Recreational Music Activities for Remo Inc, is a percussionist, a graduate of Village Music Circles, HealthRHYTHMS and Beat the Odds facilitator trainings. He is a graduate of the Newfield Network coaching program, member of the International Coaching Federation, the Drum Circle Facilitators Guild and the Percussive Arts Society.

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